

ASPIRA *Policy Brief*

February, 1998

President Clinton Unveils Urban Education Initiative

A new urban education initiative was announced by President Clinton in his State of The Union Address in January. While the President mentioned few details in his speech, the new initiative proposes to provide \$22 billion in interest-free bonds for school construction, half of which would be targeted to school districts that have large numbers of low-income students. The President also announced that he was proposing to reduce class size in grades 1-3 to 18. In his budget proposal, the President is including \$12.4 billion over seven years to reduce class size that would be distributed directly to states under Title I Compensatory Education-of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The President also proposed additional funding for the recruitment and preparation of new teachers through partnerships between school districts and higher education institutions to promote quality teaching in high poverty areas. The amounts proposed have not been disclosed.

Finally, the President's education initiative will include "Educational Opportunity Zones" a new program that would provide \$1.5 billion in grants over five years, on a competitive basis, to 50 school districts that are in high poverty areas. The grants would focus on raising student achievement and teacher professional development, with strong accountability measures attached.

The Urban Education Initiative was spurred by a coalition of national education

organizations, led by the Council of the Great City Schools, that wrote a letter to the President in January outlining an "Urban Education Agenda." ASPIRA, along with organizations such as the Urban League, the National Education Association, the Urban Coalition, the Rainbow Coalition, and the Institute for Educational Leadership, joined in this broad-based coalition to propose major initiatives to improve urban education. Over half of all low income students, and over two thirds of minority children, are in urban schools and they fair the worst among the country's school children. The chief school officers of the 30 largest urban school districts had pledged their support of the President's national testing initiative last year, but proposed significant increases in assistance to urban schools if students were to be expected to do well on these tests.

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Hispanic Education Initiative Announced by The White House

After almost two years of work and negotiations with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, The White House announced a major Hispanic Education Initiative to be included in the President's Fiscal 1999 budget. Several national Latino organizations, including ASPIRA, collaborated closely with the Caucus and with congressman Rubén Hinojosa, to define and propose initiatives that would target more federal funding to the education of Latino students.

The Hispanic Education Initiative proposes to significantly increase funding for existing programs, especially under Elementary and Secondary Education Act and under the Higher Education Act that is up for reauthorization this year, and to target funding to areas with high concentrations of Hispanic low income students. Chief among the concerns of the Caucus -and the Hispanic organizations that helped shape the initiative, including ASPIRA- is the exceedingly high drop-out rate among Hispanic students nation-wide. Among other proposals, this new initiative includes:

- A 25% increase in funding under Comprehensive School Reform targeted to areas with high drop-out rates;
- \$33 million increase in Bilingual Education to include new funding for teacher training;
- \$53 million increase (10%) in TRIO program funding, (Upward Bound, Talent Search, Educational Opportunity Centers and Special Services for Disadvantaged Students), including an additional \$40 million for Upward Bound early intervention programs for 6th and 7th graders in high poverty areas;
- 133% increase in funding for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) under Title III of the Higher Education Act to support the development of colleges and universities that have high concentrations (25%) of Hispanic students;

- 16% increase in funding for Migrant Education;
- 138% increase for the HEEPCAMP Program, which targets Hispanic students;
- \$5 million for a Youth Job Training Demonstration Program under the Department of Labor for training of 14 to 15 year-olds;
- \$20 million for Model English as a Second Language Program under Adult Education;
- 5.3% increase in Title I (Compensatory Education- the largest federal education program) to districts and schools with high concentrations of low-income students;

Other non-budget proposals include improved coordination of efforts among federal agencies that administer education programs such as Head Start, establishing a Spanish language 800 number, greater outreach by federal agencies to colleges and universities serving Hispanic students.

Funding for these initiatives, according to The White House, would come from projected surpluses in the national budget and from the proposed tobacco settlement. They are expected to be harshly contested by some members of Congress in the upcoming debates on the federal budget.

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